

Comments by Michael Lane, Tompkins County Chair, 2015

January 20, 2015

Fourteen strong, and backed by highly capable administrators, department heads, and hard-working employees, Tompkins County Legislators are poised to continue the People's work in a manner that is serious, progressive and fiscally responsible. It doesn't get easier. While the national economy slowly recovers, and our county enjoys statistically low unemployment, that figure paints too rosy a picture for the shrunken middle class and for the underemployed stuck in entry-level part-time jobs. Those jobs are often strung together in the never ending struggle to pay a family's cost of expensive housing, food, and clothing. We need more good-paying jobs, and we need training for our workforce to ensure those good-paying jobs will be filled with county residents well prepared to take up the tasks involved.

For the third year, New York State unfairly saddles counties with its smoke and mirrors gimmick of real property tax cap legislation, each year tightening the screws ever harder. For years, Governors and State Legislators from both parties have wrung their hands over state-mandated programs like Medicaid. They require them to be paid, not from the State's broad-based income taxes, but from the counties' real property taxes. It's alarming. Seventy-four percent of Tompkins County's real property tax goes directly to pay those mandates that we do not control. Meanwhile, roads, bridges, law enforcement services, youth, elderly, health, library, and mental health programs, to name a few, all suffer from lack of proper funding. It's time for our State Legislators to put their votes where their wringing hands are. It's no longer enough for them to shrug and say they can do nothing because it is in the Governor's proposed budget. It's time for them to vote against budgets that contain unreasonable, unfunded mandates to be paid for by county residents' real property taxes. Working with the New York State Association of Counties (NYSAC) and meeting with our State Legislators, we must constantly apply the necessary pressure to get real changes made in this unjustifiable travesty.

In 2015, the Tompkins County Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee will be charged with keeping us on an even fiscal keel, and with pushing back on unreasonable mandates and restrictions piled on us by New York State. Legislator Jim Dennis will Chair that committee. In the personnel sector, the County continues to work with our employee bargaining units to bring forth fair and effective labor contracts. Serving with Jim Dennis will be Michael Sigler as Vice Chair, Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, Peter Stein, and the new Legislator who will be elected from District 9.

Our County strives for the goal of being open and welcoming to all people. Above all, we strive for that goal within our own workforce. Our employees must feel included and appreciated not only for the service they provide for the people of Tompkins County, but for the ideas they may suggest to improve how we serve the community. To lead our effort, the Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Committee will continue this year. Leslyn McBean-Clairborne will again chair it. The committee will also continue to include members from community and staff. Among other things, a climate survey for employees will be offered, the responses evaluated, and the statistics and recommendations shared with the Legislature to help it form legislation and other positive actions.

Our Facilities and Infrastructure Committee is charged with overseeing the condition of our buildings, highways and bridges, and the solid waste programs. With road money in short supply, bringing together resources to work on the next phase of Ellis Hollow Road reconstruction, and the multimodal project for Pine Tree Road, to name two, will be a challenge. Encouraging more re-use and recycling programs in Solid Waste will be on tap. Completion of the addition to the Human Services Building for the Day Reporting program is a priority. This year, I have asked Legislator David McKenna to chair the committee, with Kathy Luz Herrera as Vice Chair, and Will Burbank, Dan Klein, and Mike Sigler as the other members.

The Government Operations Committee, reviews programs from Administration to Assessment, and our operating policies as well. It will have a busy year again this year. Our Airport program reports to that committee and will require serious and special attention as continuing changes in the airline industry often negatively impact our airport's excellent local service. Too many flight cancellations by airlines can erode our customer base. Those actions must be constantly addressed with airline managers to reduce problems. Wages paid to their employees by contractors providing services for the county will continue to be reviewed as contracts are renewed. The goal continues to be having as many such contractors as possible paying living

wages to their employees. Dan Klein will chair Government Operations this year, assisted by Nathan Shinagawa as Vice Chair, and Dooley Kiefer, David McKenna, and the new District 9 Legislator, when elected.

The Broadband Committee that reports to the Government Operations Committee will continue, and David McKenna will continue to chair it. Broadband internet service for everyone in the county, continues to be the goal. Efforts to obtain more funding to complete the project will continue.

Our Health and Human Services Committee always has a full agenda. The Social Services and Mental Health programs that it oversees, as well as our Health Department, Office for the Aging, Human Rights, and Youth Services, are active departments. Special Attention this year will include how Youth Services works with other municipalities, such as the City of Ithaca. Peter Stein has agreed to serve as Chair of the committee for 2015, with Kathy Luz Herrera as Vice Chair, and Carol Chock, Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, and the new District 9 Legislator being the other members.

The Economic Development Committee continues for 2015, and will be chaired by Martha Robertson. Economic Development continues to be an important thrust for our county and Martha will be able to bring her experience to bear as a past Legislature Chair, and former representative to the Regional Economic Development Council for the Southern Tier. Projects like the Airport industrial Development site, Chainworks redevelopment, and many other important projects throughout the county demand attention. At the same time, development needs to be guided by principles that can lead to more use of renewable energy sources. Joining Martha is Will Burbank as Vice Chair, and members, Jim Dennis, Mike Sigler and Peter Stein.

Dooley Kiefer will chair the county's Planning, Energy, and Environmental Quality Committee. That committee has an important agenda of rolling out the update of the County's Comprehensive Plan. In addition, an energy roadmap to be brought forth from our Planning Department will help chart a course towards renewable energy and lower greenhouse gas emissions. Working together, the Planning Department and Tompkins County Area Development can assist us in charting a course toward both an environmentally friendly, and an economically developable county. Carol Chock will be the Vice Chair of the Committee and Dan Klein, Dave McKenna and Martha Robertson will be members.

Our Public Safety Committee faced difficult and sometimes heated controversies last year. It promises to have an active year in 2015 as well. I have asked Nathan Shinagawa to chair it. Emergency response to critical situations, jail program capacity, possible state changes in defense of indigents, may all come to the forefront both now and in the months ahead. Jim Dennis will be Vice Chair and, Will Burbank, Carol Chock, and Martha Robertson will be members.

The Old Library Committee, a special committee will continue in 2015 and meet as needed to review responses to the request for proposals this spring. The goal is to present a final recommendation and have the Legislature act on it this year. I [Michael Lane], will serve as Chair again. The Vice Chair is Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, and the other members are Dooley Kiefer, Kathy Luz Herrera, and Michael Sigler.

The Charter Review Committee, also a special committee, plans to complete its work this year and propose charter revisions to the Legislature. The charter is our county's constitution and the Charter itself requires a review at least every decade. I [Michael Lane] will Chair the committee again. Dooley Kiefer is Vice Chair, and the members are Kathy Luz Herrera, Dan Klein and Peter Stein.

To my colleagues on the Legislature let me conclude by thanking all of you for your hard work last year for the people we represent. Every year it gets harder and more complicated to serve. This year there will be lots of challenges, but with your good will, your ideas and your remarkable service, 2015 will be a great year for our county. With my trust in the People, our employees, and in each of you, I am confident that we will go about our work and get it done in a manner of which we can all be very, very proud.

Thank you.